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Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and
d

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: Ambassador on February 19 reviewed with Deputy PM/FM Dr. Mohammed Al Sabah a range of issues including the March 2 donors conference in Sharm Al-Sheikh, which the FM will attend (ref A), Russia's possible S-300 air defense missile sale to Iran (ref B), and the USG's ongoing Afghanistan/Pakistan policy review (ref C). Ambassador noted in the context of other CT cooperation that Kuwait's four remaining Guantanamo detainees presented serious security challenges that would have to be addressed. The FM expressed interest in the new administration's approaches toward Iran and Syria, particularly given press reports the U.S. planned to send an Ambassador to Damascus soon. He said French President Sarkozy's visit had gone well but that the GOK had made no commitments on arms sales. He acknowledged he would travel soon to Iraq but provided no specific time frame. (Note: We subsequently received both oral and written requests to provide logistical support for a February 25 quick visit to deliver a message to President Talibani -- who we understand will not be present -- and to lunch with his counterpart, FM Zebari. End Note.) End Summary.

Iran and Concerns Over S-300 Missiles From Russia -----

[1](#)2. (S) Ambassador suggested to FM Dr. Mohammed that the Secretary's presence at the March 2 Sharm Al Sheikh donors' conference afforded an opportunity for the GCC 3 countries to discuss with her on its margins the new Administration's approach to Iran. In that context, Ambassador noted ref B concerns that Russia, contrary to its 2006 assurances, appeared to be on the verge of technical preparations for the delivery of S-300 air defense missile systems to Iran. Such a transfer at this time would send confusing signals to Teheran at a time the international community should be united in pressing Iran to abide by its international obligations with regard to its nuclear programs. Ambassador noted that U/S Burns had raised this issue with Russian FM Lavrov and urged the GOK to do the same, given its ties to Moscow.

[1](#)3. (S) In response, the FM sought clarification regarding the nature and coverage afforded by the S-300 systems, alluding

to a recent Iranian statement to the effect that Russia "had an obligation" to protect Iran's Bushehr nuclear reactor. The FM asked whether S-300's were designed to provide coverage to the Bushehr site only or to Iran's "three or four" other sites. Ambassador responded that the only Russian "commitment" she was aware of with respect to Bushehr was the start-up and fresh fuel assemblies associated with its commercial contract to support Iran's civilian nuclear energy program under IAEA auspices, but offered to seek confirmatory clarification. (Note: Subsequently done through Embassy Moscow and conveyed to FM. End Note.)

Sharm Al Sheikh Conference

14. (C) Turning back to the March 3 Sharm Al Sheikh gathering, Ambassador noted that Special Envoy Mitchell would join the Secretary there. The U.S. sought to endorse and support Cairo's role in promoting our goals of Gaza's long term reconstruction in the context of a durable cease fire leading toward a two-state solution with strong PA leadership. Ambassador alluded to the Secretary's positive exchange in Washington with Egyptian FM Aboul Gheit (Ref D) The FM noted that Egyptian plans for Palestinian reconciliation talks had been put on indefinite hold following Israel's demand that Gilat Shalit be released prior to any ceasefire agreement. (Note: As of February 23, we understand these talks are back on for February 25. End note.) The FM observed that Syria had shown indications it was prepared to re-engage with the "moderate" camp following Kuwait's divisive economic summit and asked regarding press reports the U.S. would soon be sending an Ambassador to Damascus. Drawing on Department

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press guidance, Ambassador noted those reports were premature but agreed with the FM that Syria had always proven to be a spoiler when not drawn into the process. (Note: CNN the following evening announced direct talks between the U.S. and Syria; we've still not seen any front channel messages on this development, if true. End Note.)

Iranian Party Crashers

15. (S) This exchange led into a riff on Qatar and its role vis-avis Iran, which remains a very bitter topic for the Kuwaitis. In response to Ambassador's remark that she understood Qatar may have agreed not to attempt to include Iran in its March AL summit in Doha, Dr. Mohammed practically sputtered. The Iranians, he said, would find "some way" to insert themselves, as they had attempted to do during the Amir's January economic summit in Kuwait. First they had asked that FM Mottaki be permitted to deliver in person a letter from President Ahmadinejad to the Amir; naturally, Mottaki would arrive just as Saudi King Abdullah would be arriving with other summit guests. The Kuwaitis demurred. Next the Iranians proposed that Ahmadinejad deliver the message by phone, during the summit, again conveying the optic that Iran was playing a role. In the event, the GOK suggested that -- as Iran had an Ambassador in Kuwait -- the Iranian Ambassador could deliver any message to the FM in his office. "Naturally," added Dr. Mohammed, "there was no message because in the end the optic was far more important than any substance."

Afghanistan Policy Review

16. (C) Raising Ref C, Ambassador noted that the new administration wanted to come to the April 3-4 NATO meetings with a policy and a gameplan that took into consideration the viewpoints and suggestions of our allies. In this regard, she remarked that Vice President (then Senator) Biden had found his January 8 exchange with the PM and Dr. Mohammed very useful (ref E). The Ambassador noted that our challenges included agreeing on an acceptable definition of

"success."

Alternatives to Manas Airbase

¶7. (C) In the context of Afghanistan, Ambassador flagged for the FM the recent decision by the Government of Kyrgyzstan to close Bishkek's Manas airbase, which has been a critical logistical support node for NATO operations in Afghanistan. The U.S. combatant commander would be reassessing our needs and examining options within the AOR, one of which might be Ali Al Salem airbase in Kuwait. We were deeply appreciative of Kuwait's continuing support for U.S. operations in the region; General Petraeus was considering a visit in April and would be prepared to discuss more fully our operational requirements.

FM Travel to Iraq

¶8. (C) The FM acknowledged that rumors of his impending travel to Iraq are true (ref F), although the GOK is clearly piqued the Iraqis pre-emptively announced his travel. (Note: Although press reports have suggested mid-March, subsequent GOK requests for logistical support to move the FM from the BIAP to the Green Zone indicate the FM intends to visit Baghdad as early as February 25th, arriving from Cairo. Once in Baghdad he will deliver a letter from the Amir for President Talibani, who we understand will be out of the country, and will dine with his counterpart, FM Zebari. End Note.) That said, the FM could not resist noting somewhat acerbically that Iraqi VP Tariq Al-Hashemi had been holding "an open invitation" to visit Kuwait since January, which he'd not acted on. Perhaps, the FM mused, it was because Al-Hashemi had not done well in the provincial elections. Agreeing with our assessment those elections had gone well, the FM said the GOK was "hopeful" about progress there but remained concerned about PM Maliki's role and political temperament: would he become "more flexible" or operate as a "party boss"? Ambassador responded that the elections had demonstrated a clear rejection of Iranian influence and in that regard represented a personal victory for Maliki as a national leader rather than a partisan boss. The FM nodded, but did not respond.

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CT Cooperation and Guantanamo Detainees

¶9. (S) Ambassador briefed the FM on a sensitive operation earlier proposed to the Interior Minister (ref G) regarding a known Kuwaiti terror/jihadist financier. Ambassador underscored to the FM that increasing USG frustration with Kuwait's inadequate CT legislation and the apparent political constraints against taking decisive action with respect to known terrorist facilitators, such as Mohammed Al-Bathali, were leading some to consider other options for curtailing these individuals' activities. Afghanistan was a priority for the new administration and the combatant commander was very concerned about ongoing support from the Gulf states for those fighting in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In this regard, Ambassador noted that Kuwait's Ambassador to Washington, Shaykh Salem Al Sabah, had been in touch with the Secretary's Ambassador-at-large for War Crimes issues Clint Williamson to discuss the status of Kuwait's four remaining Guantanamo detainees. Acknowledging reports that several other GTMO detainees had been released to Iraq, Ambassador underscored the importance of taking steps to ensure we did not have a repeat of the previous episode, when former Kuwaiti detainee Abdullah Al-Ajmi returned to Iraq where he self-detonated. While we were aware of reports that a number of Saudi detainees who'd gone through the rehabilitation process had subsequently returned to join Al Qaeda in Yemen, nonetheless the majority had reintegrated successfully and we continued to believe it important for Kuwait to take similar steps.

The FM was noncommittal.

Sarkozy Visit

¶10. (C) Finally, the Ambassador asked the FM whether he'd been pleased with the recent visit of French President Sarkozy. Echoing what we'd heard elsewhere, (ref H and I) albeit with a more positive spin, the FM noted that the visit had gone "very well" and that Sarkozy had proposed that Kuwait purchase certain air and naval defensive systems but the GOK "had not promised anything." For the Kuwaitis, the most interesting aspect of the visit was the prospect of discussing nuclear power options with the French who, it is generally acknowledged, are leaders in the field. The FM said the two sides had discussed regional issues, with Sarkozy responding to Kuwaiti concerns by reiterating French interest in pursuing Lebanon's sovereignty and stability and pursuing reconstruction in Gaza; Sarkozy also said Mubarak had invited him to co-chair the March 2 donors conference in Sharm Al Sheikh and that he would not be attending a rival conference in Doha.

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